



Natomas Oral Histories

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Oral interview of

Elwin F. (Bill) Christophel

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Interviewer and transcriber: Anne Z. Ofsink

Center for Sacramento History
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd
Sacramento, CA 95811-0229
(916) 808-7072
csh@cityofsacramento.org
www.centerforsacramentohistory.org
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This is a mostly verbatim transcript, but some parts of the interview have been paraphrased.

Anne: We're here with Bill Christophel and he has been sharing a little bit with us about Jefferson School. He had gone to a previous Jefferson School in Sacramento, I guess? And then came out to the Jefferson School here that we have a picture of.

Bill: I first started kindergarten at Jefferson School at 17th and N Street. The Jefferson School in Natomas did not have a kindergarten.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: I must not have been very impressed, because I don't remember nothing of my experience — this is talking about my experience at the Jefferson School in Sacramento. The only thing I can remember is sitting by a bay window overlooking 17th Street. *[Laughter]* I didn't like school. The following year, I went to the local school, Jefferson. This converted from a one-room to a two-room school. It did not have electric lights. It had a one-cylinder gas engine to pump water. Lighting was provided by coil lamps. The only teacher at the time was Mrs. Thomas. She spoke pure Portuguese, which was a necessity because 90% of the students were children of recent immigrants from Portugal. The big kids from fifth to eighth grades were responsible for keeping the fire going in the big pot-bellied stove. The student body consisted of 25. I believe there were four students in my class. One Japanese, two Portuguese, and myself. In the second grade, Mrs. Breuner made her appearance. We also — well, in the second grade, electricity, and Mrs. Breuner made our school a real enterprise.

Anne: Oh!

[0:01:58]

Bill: Yes, we were first-class now — we've got electric lights and two teachers. *[Laughter]* We played games with our archrival American Basin, the other school in Natomas. You know where the American Basin School was located, do you not?

Anne: Well, it is one of the spots we made on our tour. We think it is the control tower of the airport. About right there.

Bill: Actually, it was right about in the middle of the runway. On the old 16, right.

Anne: Ok.

Bill: It was right across from the control tower, about a quarter of a mile west of that.

Anne: Ok.

Bill: This Mrs. Thomas just loved to present plays and other theatrical enterprises. At Christmas, we had great Christmas shows. In another school year and another production, at one of these presentations I was a groom and my bride was Margaret Inderkum. *[Laughter]*. We played games with our archrival American Basin Natomas school. Some of the big kids carved solid wood airplanes. Lindy had just flown

to Paris and it was on the minds of all the young people. Another game I remember was called Ante Ante Over, in which the players on both sides of the school building would toss the ball over the school and the person that caught it would run around to the other side. I think finally when everybody got on one side, they won.

Anne: Oh. *[Laughter]* That sounds like fun.

[00:03:48]

Bill: One of the things we did, one of the things in the spring, was walk to the Nafi Ranch, which later became the Winston Ranch, which I farmed for a while. They had cherry orchards there and they'd take the kids down to have cherries. Well, that wasn't much for me because I had cherries at home.

[Laughter]

Anne: That's right. *[Laughter]*

Bill: That was something else. Oh, and we had a total eclipse of the sun there. We smoked the glasses and the whole thing. It was kind of scary. *[Laughter]* I was not a model student, as I relayed earlier, by any stretch of the imagination. I was placed in the busy corner, not to widen my horizons, but to keep from distracting the others. I decided that I really didn't have to learn anything because my mother and father were both school board trustees, so I felt it wasn't important for me to learn — I'd just draw it in from the ether.

Anne: The association. *[Laughter]*

Bill: Because of this, my spelling and simple arithmetic are still with me today. And thanks to the spellchecker that I'm able to even do this.

Anne: That's wonderful.

Bill: Then I went on to Sierra School.

Anne: Oh, you did? So, you guys were kind of moving between town and —

[00:05:38]

Bill: Oh yes. I went to many schools.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: Many colleges. *[Laughter]* I don't know. Let's see, I went to Jefferson to Sierra, Sierra to California Junior High. I don't know — are you from the Sacramento area?

Anne: I'm from Holland, Michigan.

Bill: Oh. How long have you been in Sacramento?

Anne: Since the '70s.

Bill: Do you know where Sierra School is?

Anne: I can't place it at the moment.

Bill: At 24th and 4th Avenue. They have a theater there —

Anne: Yes. I used to live right over there, on 23rd.

Bill: Ok. I hadn't mentioned it — I would walk to my grandmother's house, who lived in Curtis Park, for lunch. My dad would drop me off and I'd catch the 21st streetcar and go on out K Street and 21st and eventually to school. After school, I would go play with some friends. Burnett Miller? Of Burnett and Sons Lumber Company?

Anne: Oh yes.

Bill: He did the remodeling for the Capitol. They milled all the special things that were —

Anne: Oh my.

Bill: So, anyway, I'd go visit with him. Then I'd catch the streetcar and go down to 21st and T, and I'd transfer to the T Street streetcar.

Anne: What fun riding streetcars.

Bill: And that streetcar, that same streetcar, I heard Sacramento Transit was going to pick it up. They had one year running between the downtown area — and they had the same old car. *[Laughter]* Riding down K Street on the light rail was quite a — because earlier on, my friend Dick Moore from Sierra School, we would catch the trolley down for the New Year's celebration.

Anne: That would be such fun.

Bill: But here I am riding the light rail down K Street where I used to ride the trolley. That was interesting. *[Laughter]* Then that big windstorm came, I think it was in '37. Knocked down all these stately elms that we had.

[00:08:04]

Anne: Oh really?

Bill: It took about a week to clean up around the ranch from the oak trees to where the house was — David [Bill's son] lives right adjacent to the old home.

Anne: Right. I remember the old home. I used to buy fruit over there from Maren and the girls.

Bill: Matter of fact, when I leave here today, one of the boys that worked for me, along with the Coker son —

Anne: All right.

Bill: They ran my fruit stand one summer. That's when I started losing my hair and my hair turned gray. *[Laughter]* I hadn't seen them for years. David happened to be flying back from San Diego the other day

and guess who was there? Willie Campton[?]. So, Bessie[?] has invited them over, so I'm going to go there for dinner tonight. *[Laughter]*

Anne: Oh, that will be fun. That will be interesting. *[Laughter]*

Bill: They finally abandoned that, because all the trollies were down, the wires were down, so they abandoned that streetcar.

Anne: Oh, so it had to do with that windstorm? Oh. Isn't that something.

Bill: It was kind of convenient because the T Street line terminated at 7th and I, and my dad worked at the courthouse. My grandmother was —

Anne: Yes.

Bill: So I would ride home with him. It was just as convenient for me to ride into town school as it was to come out to this school.

Anne: Yes. Now didn't the electric train come out here?

Bill: No, the electric train, the Sacramento Northern, was on the other side, the Woodland Branch. There was a station by the old Elkhorn Ferry.

Anne: I was going to ask about that.

[00:10:00]

Bill: The teachers for the American Basin school would use electric lines to get there, get the ferry, come across, and then walk down to school, or some of the farmers up there would provide them with a horse.

Anne: So, the Northern Electric would go on the other side of the river and one of the stops would be at the Elkhorn Ferry?

Bill: That's right.

Anne: Otherwise, it would go on its way — did it go all the way to Woodland? The electric?

Bill: Oh yes.

Anne: My! Was there also a piece of the electric that went over more by Northgate? Was there another one?

Bill: Oh yes. That was the main line that went to Chico.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: Sacramento, North Sacramento, Del Paso.

Anne: So that was an electric line, too?

Bill: Mm-hm. Third rail. People would get shocked. I had somewhere a picture of one of the floods. I was just thinking about it today — I have this one that shows this electric train coming up by Pleasant Grove and the water splashing, and it's going right along, and I imagine if the water rose any more, it would even hit the third rail and that would stop operation, of course.

[00:11:57]

Anne: Whoa! It's hard to imagine that they somehow were able to do electric lines. You're saying the third rail was the electricity.

Bill: The rails themselves were ground, and the high voltage was in the third rail. It has a little metal flap. They put wood over it to cover it up, so people couldn't come and stumble on it.

Anne: Yes, accidents happen.

Bill: There was a fellow that I used to work with at Orchard Supply over where the Highway Patrol Academy is [*unintelligible*]. [*Tape cuts out*] — and he just disappeared.

Anne: Oooh.

Bill: So that was something. But, that electric line was really — it went up to Chico. Matter of fact, when I was in the service up in Chico, at the Chico Air Force Base — it was diesel by then.

Anne: Oh, you were? Uh-huh.

Bill: It's all gone now.

Anne: Be interesting to trace, though. It would be kind of a fun paper, a write-up just to see where they went.

Bill: Yeah, I could do that because I'm an old railroad buff. [*Laughter*]

Anne: Oh, are you? It would be interesting to see what electric lines circled Natomas and where they went after they came from here.

Bill: Yes. There was another line that branched off in North Sacramento and went down Arden Way — well, the same right-of-way where light rail is today. Out by Swanstons, which is by the SP.

Anne: Oh. Yes. Isn't that something. I used to live out there. That's when we were talking about Sierra School, kind of near Sierra School, where the SP and that Swansons Cleaners is at.

Bill: No, Sierra School was in South Sacramento, near Curtis Park.

Anne: Yes.

Bill: Swanstons Station was on the end of Arden Road — a meatpacking operation.

Anne: Oh. Then I'm not thinking of the same. I was thinking Swansons Cleaners. You're saying Swanston meatpacking. Ok, ok. What I'm going to do is turn this off and I'm going to —

[Tape stops briefly, then resumes.]

[00:14:22]

Bill: I don't know if you're aware that the rivers ran on natural levees. The natural levees were laid down when the river overflows back, and the sand would fall out first, and then the silt, and then the clay, and the further away you got from the river, the finer the soil. The elevation declined. These were basins. "American Basin." *[Laughter]*

Anne: That's right.

Bill: American Lakes were — there was a school named American Lakes. *[Tape cuts out]* They go clear on up to Sutter Basin, clear up just out of Chico, both sides of the river. So, these soils are very fertile and then *[tape cuts out]* — They wanted to protect the land, so they started dredging and building banks on both sides — so on one side, and then the river would come up, and the people on the side would build theirs higher, and it would get higher and higher.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: Finally, there was a fellow who was a banker and a farmer and a political activist in Colusa. He's the one who primarily came up with the idea of building the bypass systems, which is like when you go over to Davis — the Yolo Bypass? And Sutter Bypass up north, which went through the old basins *[unintelligible]*. There's a book that I find *[tape cuts out]* — in the flood control business, one of the texts is *[tape cuts out]* —

Anne: Oh.

Bill: I tried to find a copy of it. I have two copies, and I couldn't find either of them.

Anne: Oh, really. Ok. I'd like to see it.

[00:16:41]

Bill: It's great. About the politics and what not.

Anne: Really?

Bill: V. S. McClatchy, which was C. K.'s brother, was an engineer and he had a lot to do with the building of it. C. K. McClatchy was the head of the paper and they were talking about how the Natomas Company was messing up the environment along the American River, and they had these big editorials about how horrible big business was and wasting all this good land. So they said, "Well, heck, we'll just build a levee around up north of Sacramento, and then you'll have all the land you want and we'll keep mining up here." *[Laughter]* The Natomas Company then hired these engineers, civil engineers, who had just completed building the railroad from Salt Lake to Sacramento. They were out of a job. Truxel was one of them. And a fellow by the name of Oliver. And McCormick.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: Then they built telephone lines.

Anne: Burton Lauppe talked about servicing the telephone lines.

Bill: They had two of them. One line was owned by the Natomas Company, and the other was the farmers line, that the Lauppes managed. The telephone line, they had contact with where the Reclamation District office is, they had two. And they were building two [*unintelligible*] for the district. But their engineering work was just fabulous. They laid out the subdivisions. I imagine old Truxel could come out right now, walk across here, and say, "Oh yeah, that's a corner lot."

Anne: Oh my!

[00:19:13]

Bill: I might have told you this story, but at one time my dad was trying to bypass the Natomas Company to get a telephone to our house. They were coming along what is now practically where West El Camino is, so we went over there to get the section corner, and a man with a truck who had a young man with him wanted to find that monument. He looks around and around, and — there! The kid starts digging and there's the monument. [*Laughter*]

Anne: There was a monument that showed exactly where that section was divided? [*Laughter*]

Bill: They had all the corners in. But later on, a lot of the farmers went and dug them out because there was a land overload there. [*Laughter*]

Anne: Isn't that something. He knew this area. He'd helped put those monuments in, and was he part of dividing it?

Bill: Oh yeah, he was an engineer. It was a very good job. I think they still have some of those old maps down at the Reclamation District. They made tons of them.

Anne: We have an old map that we show people. 1914. Have you seen that?

Bill: Oh yes.

Anne: It's wonderful. Tom Barandas came and spoke to the historical society and brought a whole bunch of them with him.

Bill: What you see there is all the lots are designated and various subdivisions: Riverside subdivision, Elkhorn, Bennett, and so forth.

Anne: Right.

Bill: They're all there. They have — really, when the Reclamation District was dealing with Caltrans when they were building 70 and 5 up through here.

Anne: They did an excellent job.

[00:21:16]

Bill: Oh yes. [Laughter] I just finished reading *Nothing Like It in the World*. The building of the transcontinental railroad.

Anne: Oh. Impressive. You felt like Truxel did a very good job with that crew, Oliver and —

Bill: Oliver, I think, was a senior engineer. I never — I met him once, I think. He was older, I think, than Truxel. He was probably Truxel's boss.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: He owned some land right down what is Orchard Lane now, where we lived. Actually, it was about where interstate 80 crosses West El Camino.

Anne: All right. Did you ever get to know Mr. Truxel?

Bill: Oh yeah. I have to confess, he was one of my heroes.

Anne: Oh! He was one of your heroes! Well, that's wonderful. [Laughter] We have a member, Kathleen Jensen, who is researching Truxel and trying to find a photo. And, she has been down to the Masons, and she knows where he's buried in the East Sacramento cemetery. She's trying to gather whatever she can. On any of your home videos, is he on there?

Bill: No, I didn't see any of that. I didn't get the video till 1937. Just prior to that is when [unintelligible].

Anne: Yes.

Bill: He lived down there almost at the end of Powerline Road and —

Anne: Garden Highway.

Bill: Garden Highway. A big area there.

Anne: On the other side of the river.

Bill: On the other side of the levee.

[00:23:19]

Anne: Right, other side of the levee. Excuse me. We've heard a bit about how they had this walkway and a lot of the kids felt like it was scary —

Bill: Oh yes.

Anne: — to cross the walkway to get to his place. Any other stories about him?

Bill: He was a bachelor.

Anne: He was a good ol' bachelor, you said?

Bill: It's too bad that Mr. Fitzpatrick doesn't live here. He was the superintendent of the Reclamation District. He could really tell you stories about all those old boys. We became good friends. See, the pumphouse was right at the corner of my dad's property. And in the wintertime, when they would pump the water out of that big old *[tape cuts out]* — and I was a little kid, "Yay!"

Anne: *[Laughter]* A young kid taking a look at that! That's pretty exciting.

Bill: Then we'd watch the water come up and there'd be a flood. So that's where I got interested in flood control, I guess. I remember, I guess it was about 1928 or '29, there was a major flood. *[Tape cuts out]* He *[Bill's dad]* was working at the Treasurer's office and he came home. The way he used to get here was out the 16th Street Bridge. There was a trestle after the American River Bridge that went out and over. There were railroad crossings for the Sacramento Northern and the Western Pacific. *[Laughter]* That was kind of scary. *[Laughter]*

Anne: *[Laughter]* Sounds like it.

Bill: Anyway, he said that — then a branch came off of that, which is essentially where Northgate is today. And then it continued over to the levee. That's how you'd get into Natomas. You'd have to go out 16th.

Anne: Do we have pictures of that? I mean did you get any of that on your tape?

Bill: I don't think so, again that was prior to that —

Anne: That's right. That's 1928, compared to '39.

[00:25:24]

Bill: So he came home and said, "Oh boy, it's bad out there." Then other floods came along. And finally there was one near the airport, where we had trouble in '86. Let me back up a second. Most of the levees were built by clamshell: picking the stuff out of the bottom and putting it up on the side on the banks. But when Natomas Company started, they hired these people and they dug a trench, like a big ditch with banks on both sides. Then they had a suction dredge that went into the river and sucked out the sand and filled a big trench up with sand. Then they had Fresno scrapers, which were one Fresno scraper and a guy running it.

Anne: Yes.

Bill: And he would scoop this stuff up and make the levee, as well. Most of the regions of the levee had kind of a sandy silt. But up by the airport, it was rockier, a very poor sand.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: As soon as the water got over the level of the dirt of that original back, then the water got inside and it was just going down the center of the levee, and oozing out.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: So they would have trouble. They were doing this and that. So, in '86, when Dick Willey contacted me early in the morning, he said, "We got some problems. You might want to get your equipment out." So I went up there and took a looksee, and I'm standing on the levee on the pavement, and all of a sudden *whoosh*. [*Laughter*]

Anne: Oh.

[00:27:32]

Bill: They, the [Reclamation District 1000] board was right on the ball. They got an engineer flying in on a helicopter, they got Teichert out there, and they signed a contract on the back of a grocery bag —

Anne: Oh. [*Laughter*]

Bill: — to start the repair work. From that time on, that was about 10 o'clock in the morning, and by 2 o'clock in the afternoon, they were going full bore, and they went for about 36 hours.

Anne: Oh, that is impressive. So, now I'm thinking that this was only up near the airport area? Not down here, because they had made those other ones that were better.

Bill: No, no. It was the same design, but the suction dredge was pulling out a coarser sand, a fine pea gravel.

Anne: Yes.

Bill: So, it was more coarse, so the water could move through that easier. But today, they still have some trouble, so they're working on it.

Anne: But that is not down in this area here? It's up in there? It's up north where the pea gravel is.

Bill: Prior to that, they came in — following that, they came down and put that berm up next to it, which would stabilize that. Then from Powerline Road on down, they put in a slurry wall.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: What a slurry wall is, when you go into Sacramento and go across the American River bridge right now and you look both ways, can see where they flattened it out, and great big berms, some cement. Kind of a wall, about yay wide, and backed on both sides of the levee. It makes it pretty impervious.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: But there is another little problem they have, and I don't think there's a resolution. They find that there's a possibility of seepage.

Anne: Oh really?

[00:29:41]

Bill: If you come in from San Francisco on 80, and you see that sign that says, "This levee leaks."

Anne: Oh yes.

Bill: That's what it refers to.

Anne: Oh.

Bill: *[Laughter]* But, as far as I'm concerned — a little side story here. My colleagues in the flood control business, they asked me why I moved to Auburn. "Well," I say, "I lived there, Natomas, all my life. Always felt we had the most secure levees around, but then these engineers came in and said they were only good for 68 years, and I'm over 68, so I'm getting out." *[Laughter]*

Anne: Now we're up to 100 — are you going to move back? *[Laughter]*

Bill: *[Laughter]* Oh shoot. Well, anyway. No, it's — there's no such thing as a perfect levee. It bothers me to a certain degree that, probably, they should not be building houses out there. The main thing, I was just telling David the other day, the main thing is, when we irrigate, we build little ridges with a disc. Well, levees rise and start leaking, and if you're out there with a shovel when it starts leaking, you're ripping your head off. So, what you've got to do is two things: one, you have to build good levees, and secondly, you have to be very alert and anticipate that someplace along that line, there's going to be a problem. So, you know right away and you're ok. There's a whole lot of people out there.

Anne: You don't want to become complacent. You want people to stay alert and be watching.

Bill: And, one thing that I'm very proud of with the Reclamation District, when I was on that, is we have this with the water company, they work all summer for them, but in the wintertime they don't do much irrigating. So, we hired them to be levee control people. So, the reclamation guys and water company guys would drive around together. I can't remember, but it's either 30 or 40 minutes, that somebody — *[tape cuts out]*

Anne: That's pretty frequently — 30 or 40 minutes — to be watching things.

Bill: Yeah, and that to me is the difference between disaster and — my whole view when I was in the flood control business was there's lives, property, and that was the main two things *[tape cuts out]* —

[00:32:34]

Anne: *[Laughter]* That's right. So, you've written up an oral history of your own. What time span do you cover? How far have you gotten on yours here?

Bill: Well, right now I'm at about a year after World War II.

Anne: Oh, ok.

Bill: A year after I moved back. Let's see, I haven't been married yet. I met my wife —

Anne: Well, so I'm wondering whether we want to continue from there, just off your memory, and it'll be a rough draft form, and then you can just stick in anything that you forget, you know, because you don't have your stuff around you or anything. We can do that, and just kind of move forward.

Bill: Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I've got my outline written.

Anne: Ok.

Bill: I do plan to continue on. David wanted me to do it on tape. I started doing it, but it didn't sound good at all.

Anne: Well, the way I always feel is we're trying to get some written things that are going to be preserved that can help people around here just know what life was like in Natomas and preserve some of these interesting facts that went on here, you know, throughout its lifespan. I feel like what we get written is what we keep, you know? These, in my mind, these tapes are guides at this point. I feel it is what we are using to form the written. So —

Bill: I started doing that, as I said, and I got one reel of tape going and I listened to it and I thought, oh, I can't use this.

Anne: Oh, ok. So, school board.

[00:34:43]

Bill: The school board had five trustees and four teachers, including the principal. *[Laughter]*

Anne: Oh. *[Laughter]*

Bill: We, at one time, after we grew and there were more teachers, we had a school orientation where there were new teachers, and one was from, I think she was from Pennsylvania, and she said, "This country is so flat!" *[Laughter]* So, I explained why it was flat.

Anne: Yeah, good. This kind of reminds me of the discussion that I had with you earlier about trying to get together the board members. At this point it would just be Ed Witter, I guess, and you, and Ed Willey. Is that correct? No, it's Clark.

Bill: Clark?

Anne: Clark, and you, and Ed Willey. Is that right?

Bill: Well, yeah, that's some of them.

Anne: Ok.

Bill: Paul Shimada.

Anne: Yes, but I don't think he'd be able to talk right now. I don't think he's doing very well.

Bill: Oh really? That man was something else. He had a notebook, and he was booked up solid two years in advance.

Anne: *[Laughter]* Really?!

Bill: I'd go — we'd go to school board conventions and what not. He was such a delightful person.

Anne: That is — I always enjoyed him. He was a member of our historical society.

Bill: Paul Shimada — no, wait a minute. [Shiro] Tokuno. Do you know him?

Anne: No.

[00:36:26]

Bill: He was on the board. Dr. — [*Bill knocks on the table trying to think of the name*] Ohhhh. He was up next to Ed Willey. [*Tape cuts out*]

Anne: Dr. Brown?

Bill: He was on our board. He was our first black board member.

Anne: Oh, he was? That would be good.

Bill: If you can get ahold of him. I'm sure he could tell you some stories, too.

Anne: That would be great.

Bill: I remember —

Anne: What was his first name, Doc Brown?

Bill: Dr. Brown, let's see — Leroy Brown! [*Laughter*]

Anne: Was it?

Bill: Yeah, how could I forget?

Anne: Oh, okay, good.

Bill: We were having a discussion about affirmative action — what is it? He said to the guy, what would bring all races together? [*Tape cuts out*] "It's fine, accepting," he says, "I'm a black doctor. My uncle sent me through school and the whole thing, and I worked really hard. I don't want to see black kids going to school, getting a degree, and not being a good doctor because that only reflects on me."

Anne: Oh.

Bill: [*Laughter*] So, here we're arguing. We had some great times together, good old Leroy.

Anne: Well, I'm going to see once if I can — first of all, what I'm going to do is contact, well, I can't think of his name, but the superintendent of the schools right now. I know who he is and I just don't know his name right now, but anyway, he's really —

Bill: They have a new one now.

Anne: Yes, and you're thinking of the principal — oh no, that's right, he was the superintendent. There were two of them, one was a principal at the high school, and this other African American man was the superintendent, that's right. He's over at San Juan right now. He was really great, too. The guy that is here now, I feel like he would be really supportive of the idea of us pulling a group together, you know, and just kind of talking.

[00:38:37]

Bill: Oh, incidentally, before I forget, for your information only. At one time, my wife used to collect stuff, and we were in this place and they had a brochure from the Natomas Company of California advertising this. I donated it to the school library, so I don't know if they still have it or not.

Anne: No, it's not any of this kind of thing.

Bill: No, no. It was a brochure, you know, "This is the place to come, and all this fertile land, and da-da, da-da, da-da, da-da."

Anne: So, you wrote this up?

Bill: No, I didn't write it up.

Anne: All right. So —

Bill: She found it.

Anne: Ok. No, I'm just trying to get my facts straight here. So, there was this brochure that was written by the Natomas Company that your wife found and that you then took the brochure that she found and donated it to —

Bill: Donated it to the school district to put in the new library. That was at the old school on Del Paso Road.

[Anne and Bill have a short discussion about lunch]

[00:40:11]

Bill: I thought of something else that might be of interest to you. When they tried to build a new school. It was the Mason-Dixon line right down Powerline Road. The Jefferson School people, they wanted the school there. "We've got this wonderful school up here, we could just remodel this one." And then a bunch of good old — Fred Jones was one of them. You've probably heard of him from —

Anne: Betty Novak, nee Jones.

Bill: Oh yes, of course, that was her dad. He was a cantankerous old man. *[Laughter]*

Anne: He had the Hooverville people on his land, Fred Jones.

Bill: Oh, he would do a lot of things. He was *[unintelligible]* across the current. Probably that's why Betty Novak is the way she is. *[Laughter]*

Anne: She probably got a few of the genes.

Bill: I love Betty. *[Laughter]*

Anne: I always enjoy when she comes.

Bill: I remember one time when she came to the school board meeting, and I was the only person that stood up, and she just thought I was a real gentleman. *[Laughter]*

Anne: She's great. But you were saying that they were going to be doing this new school, and that it was really drawn down the lines. So, then what happened?

Bill: Well, we had — I was — we finally made a deal with the board. I said, "Well, I'll tell you, I'll go along with American Basin, but if it fails, we're going to put it in a neutral area someplace." I didn't know anything about protocol back then. But it failed, and I called a meeting, which I wasn't authorized to do; there should've been another person, well, we needed two people, I believe, to call a meeting. But anyway, I called a meeting and this one young fellow, he was so indignant about it. We had a knock-em-down, drag-out fight up there about American Basin School. But, as it turned out, they built the airport there, and the school had to come out anyway.

[00:42:24]

Anne: So, Jefferson School building we have, and then we have this classroom of students in our book here for our tour. I was going to say something else about the tent. I thought the picture of the tent was going to be coming up, when they were living in a tent temporarily.

Bill: Yeah, that was up in American Basin.

Anne: Was it? Ok.

Bill: That was prior to my time. Here's the buggy they used to get the — no wait, that's Inderkum.

Anne: Yeah, and I wondered if that other name of the dairy was on here that you were trying to think of. That was in Sacramento?

Bill: This is Glen Dairy. The other one was —

Anne: I thought Glen's Dairy might be the name that you were looking for earlier.

Bill: No.

Anne: Ok. Then about the Native American that lived here before. I don't know if you have any other information about that?

Bill: No

Anne: Ok, and then this woman. She lives up on the — she owns land now up where the horse ranch is, and she wrote this book. So, we just tell people on our tour that *[unintelligible]* lives in our community. Then a picture of the Elkhorn Ferry —

Bill: I rode that so often.

Anne: Did you? The Elkhorn Ferry?

Bill: I was working for Orchard Supply — I worked over in Woodland. I'd come home, I'd have parked up on the levee, have the boat go over and take a load over, come back, and if I was lucky, I'd catch the second boat.

[00:44:05]

Anne: Oh. *[Laughter]* And so the dedication in 1969.

Bill: What's this? That's the American Basin.

Anne: Right.

Bill: That was 1918.

Anne: Right. Then we show this of the "Fish House." There's the tent.

Bill: Yeah, that was up there at American Basin.

Anne: American Basin. Ok. And then here, I believe these are Dolores Barandas's parents. The Silvas? Is that right? Or, is she an Azevedo?

Bill: Dolores? Well, let's see —

Anne: Or Pereira? Pereira.

Bill: Gosh, I used to know all of these.

Anne: Anyway, it's all right. Those are her parents. Then, this is the Silva —

Bill: Yeah.

Anne: Homestead. So we have Donalda —

Bill: Donalda. Yeah.

Anne: — on our board.

Bill: They own the property where the junior high school is. Next to Azevedo's.

Anne: Ok. Then an aerial view.

Bill: That's an aerial view of it.

Anne: Yeah. Then we have Donalda and her siblings, Manuel and Helen. Then we talk about Gardenland and Northgate. So, we go in through there.

Bill: Oh, one time, anyway, the first part of Northgate developed, it was just Gardenland. Then they came in and built that one subdivision in there right off of Northgate.

Anne: Riverside? Does that sound right?

Bill: No.

Anne: All right.

Bill: I don't know what they called it. The —

Anne: Garden Acres.

Bill: No, Garden Acres was a part of — it was on the south side.

Anne: All right.

[00:45:59]

Bill: So, there was a [*unintelligible*] the newspaper, which was of the *Natomas Journal*, started this old guy, and he didn't want this North Natomas to ever start. "No. No. No. We can't stand that." He came up to me one day. He said, Bill, "You don't want those people moving into North Natomas, you don't want that developed out there, do you?" I said, "No, but I didn't want you either." [*Laughter*] I'm mean.

Anne: [*Laughter*] So, he was from the Northgate/Gardenland area, right?

Bill: Right.

Anne: So, anyway we have a little bit of that. And then this is the groundbreaking, oh yes. They put a sign in. I'm trying to get information about the Northgate/Gardenland area, too, just because the whole historical society is a part of everything in Natomas.

Bill: Gardenland kind of started during the Depression. It was — some of the people that were not completely down and out, but they were certainly down.

Anne: Sure. Yes. Well, the Hooverilles extended all the way up. We have a picture of the Hooverville here.

Bill: I didn't know that Fred Jones had a Hooverville there, though.

Anne: Well, I understand from something that I read, I think it is in this thing that Ed Witter had that we copied from stuff on his ranch. But, it was, um —

[*Side 1 ends abruptly. Side 2 begins.*]

[00:46:15]

Anne: Really?

Bill: Uh-huh.

Anne: Oh. And so, it says —

Bill: I never did get to —

Anne: “Transcribed by Ed Witter, Jr., 1989” and it was done in “History 299 Independent Research for Professor Shattuck, California State University, Sacramento, December 18, 1985.”

Bill: That’s about right.

Anne: And, it says, “Pages 1-7 contain an excellent presentation of the origination of what today is the Natomas District.”

Bill: Mm-hm.

Anne: So, I’m going to use this a little bit when I’m starting to write up some of my paperwork for —

Bill: Yes, yes.

Anne: We are trying to incorporate, you know, the historical society because we haven’t really been a — we’re not a thing yet. [*Laughter*] We’re just gathering. Now do you have any interest in being a part of our board?

Bill: Oh, as I said, I resigned from everything. [*Laughter*]

Anne: You know, just think about it.

Bill: That’d probably be — I’d consider it.

Anne: Ok. That’s good. So, I met with Richard Glavin [?], who is an attorney from downtown, who Jim Henley, my friend from the historical society, no, from the archives, hooked me up to.

Bill: Uh-huh.

Anne: He just helped us, and we’re not finished yet, you know. I have to write up some things in order to let him know what we have been doing for the past four years, prior to wanting to be incorporated. Then what we’ll want to do is get a board. So, they’ll meet four times a year, or whatever it is, and guide us, you know. And then there will be the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer of the historical society that will be meeting, right?

Bill: Mm-hm.

Anne: You know far more about this than I do. I am, like, new at this. What I am interested in getting for sure is that we have this group of people, more than just me and my energy, that are trying to help this evolve. Slowly we have been gathering people. We’ve raised something like \$800 and some dollars. We did our first — we’ve done three tours now, and the last one we did, we did gain some funds. We made \$250 or something on it.

Bill: Well, good.

[00:48:28]

Anne: I know! It was really good. So anyway, that was our very first fundraiser. So now, what I'm trying to do is I put together this letter and I'm trying to get some more funds going because we need to, you know, for the Natomas Room — we need to pay the muralist.

Bill: Now who owns that?

Anne: Who owns the Natomas Room? It's the city. So, Parks and Recreation —

Bill: Oh, it's Parks and Rec. Where is that again?

Anne: Straight down Truxel. So, this is Natomas Park. It felt like in North Sacramento, they couldn't connect it to anything. And there's South Natomas, and North Natomas, so they had to make this —

Bill: Yeah, of course. It still [*unintelligible*] my friends. [*Laughter*]

Anne: And that's why we want to do a Truxel thing, an "honoring Truxel" day, because maybe we can get them to change Natomas Boulevard to Truxel, and make Truxel all the way up instead of stopping it at Del Paso Road.

Bill: Oh, is this Natomas Boulevard now? Did I tell you that Natomas Boulevard used to be the name of East Levee Road?

Anne: Oh, did it?

Bill: Yes. And a matter of fact, I think for a while, for a very short time, it was, because I remember in our barn we had this sign that said Natomas Boulevard. And that was Natomas Boulevard and El Centro. El Centro at that time was Orchard Lane. It jogged. Then they built it through later.

Anne: Ok.

Bill: But it was a street sign, and it was Natomas Boulevard, and then across the Street was El Centro Road.

Anne: I don't have my perspective on how Natomas Boulevard —

Bill: Natomas Boulevard was essentially the Garden Highway.

Anne: Oh, ok. All right.

Bill: It went around the whole district.

Anne: Ok. I was thinking about the East Main Drainage as only being to the east. Then you were talking over by El Centro and over by Orchard Lane.

Bill: I had changed gears right in the middle of —

Anne: Oh, you did? Okay, because I'm still new here and trying to get my bearings. [*Laughter*]

Bill: I confused you.

[00:50:40]

Anne: So, we're trying to get our articles of incorporation ready to go, and we're finishing our bylaws, and we might have that done in the next month, is what I'm thinking. Then we have to start looking for some board members.

Bill: Who are the prime movers right now?

Anne: Well, me. [*Laughter*]

Bill: I gathered that.

Anne: And then we have — prime movers. People in our historical society are the Lauppes — they have come to one meeting now. I just did their oral history not long ago. Virginia Harder, who has not been to a meeting yet. Margaret and Basil Clark come all the time. Dolores Barandas comes all the time. Joaquin and Rose Pereira and Donalda and Tony Vargas were coming. Now Donalda got sick. I'm not sure if she has cancer or what exactly is going on, but she's kind of staying away from us a bit. I just keep calling her and sending her notes and doing things, but they haven't come. Rose came one time. Tony [*Anne meant "Joaquin"*] is always out of town. He has all this purchasing and he does all this land management. He owns all this property in Hawaii and Florida and Maine.

Bill: Who is this now?

Anne: The guy right here.

Bill: Joaquin?

Anne: Yeah, Joaquin Pereira.

Bill: My old partner. [*Laughter*]

Anne: That's right. So he has all these little properties everywhere. So, anyway, he's not around much, but he comes. He made sure he was here for the tour. He's so wonderful on that tour, because people just talk and he has all these stories and we just have a ball.

Bill: He's a talker.

Anne: Yeah, he is a talker and it's just interesting. He is in the regular group that comes. But a lot of these people that come, I'm not sure that they want to take positions. They just want to come and see people, and talk about people, and share information, and have us gather information, and see that it's being collected.

Bill: They don't want to do the dirty work.

[00:52:38]

Anne: Yes, and they've done a lot of their work. They've done a lot for the community, so we need those people, but now we also have some newer, younger people that are coming in also who have the energy

to do some of the work stuff. Kathleen Jenson is a real lover of history. She just transcribed the Eleanor Witter oral history. She is also the expert on Truxel right now. She is doing many miscellaneous things for the association. Then we have another fellow who just got started; I haven't met him yet, though. He paid his membership, and he's connected to the state, the water resources building, so we decided to get him connected. We have Coral Proctor who has been a librarian at the library until just recently. Over the summer she moved and took a job in the Orangevale Library. We always have our historical society meeting on the second Saturday morning in our library. She came to the last meeting.

Bill: Is that where the Natomas Room is located — at the library?

Anne: No, it's going to be. We now are meeting at the current library. It's in the same shopping plaza as LaBou's. Ok? Do you know where LaBou's is. Ok, good, so that's down there on West El Camino and Truxel. Now, if you come up north a little bit, in this old section, that was Grant Union High School's —

Bill: You mean that lot?

Anne: Yes, that lot — that's where it's building.

Bill: All right. That's kind of where I thought it was.

Anne: That's correct. It's right there.

Bill: I haven't been down —

Anne: Bannon Creek and Truxel, ok?

Bill: Ok. Gotcha.

Anne: You should go by it, because it's really happening. Right now, there's this L-shaped thing. This building that's south is the new library. A new big, beautiful library. I don't know how many square feet. So, it's there and it has a circle driveway coming in like this with parking lots all around it. It is on a huge acreage, like McKinley Park. I've been on this committee maybe two to three years now. Then the community center comes, and it's parallel to Truxel. On the south end of the community center is the Natomas Room. And it's a pumphouse.

[00:55:16]

Bill: It's a pumphouse?

Anne: Yeah. Because the whole concept of this site is to be agricultural, you know. It kind of gives you the abstract feeling of agricultural buildings. That's where we'll be. That's the Natomas Room.

Bill: It sounds great.

Anne: The city has put in a ton of money. Parks and Recreation are manning it. Heather [Fargo], now, of course, lives right around the corner because the Shimada house is right there on Bannon Creek, right?

Bill: Yeah, yeah.

Anne: She wants to keep her fingers in the pot. *[Laughter]*

Bill: And I would! *[Laughter]*

Anne: And I don't mind her keeping it — it's just that I want to be called for a meeting. I don't want to have everything stop. Anyway, so —

Bill: *[Tape cuts out briefly]* Something that I read here of my dad's that I was going to quote here.

Anne: Did it have to do with the —

Bill: With what he was thinking about.

Anne: For what?

Bill: Of how Natomas was going to develop.

Anne: Oh, ok, good. *[Laughter]* I'm going to get you a picture of what the Natomas Room looks like. This is the library.

Bill: All right.

Anne: And this is the other section. So, this is the Natomas Room. This is the Community Center. So this, this, and this are going in now. This is a whole huge auditorium thing that's in Phase III.

Bill: Oh, ok.

Anne: This sits here, south.

Bill: Uh-huh.

Anne: Then this part sits L-shaped on the east side of that. Then there will be land all behind it and we'll have the farmers market here on Saturdays.

Bill: Oh good.

Anne: Yeah, it's just really fun!

[00:57:28]

Anne: Frank Christophel was your great-grandfather and Elmer was your —

Bill: No, Frank was my grandfather.

Anne: Ok, I want to make sure that I — so Frank was the grandfather.

Bill: My great-grandfather was Nickolas and he came over in the 1850s.

Anne: Who is Elmer?

Bill: My dad.

Anne: Oh. Ok. So, Frank is your grandfather. Elmer is your dad. [*Referring to Frank and Elmer's written personal histories*] This one that says Frank, and then this one that has the "Brush Pile Orchard" —

Bill: That's my dad's. That's Elmer.

Anne: Ok, so this is Elmer. This is wonderful. Look at this history of you guys saving your history! That's so good!

Bill: [*Laughter*] Well, I start mine off, I'm saying, in my grandfather and my father's footsteps, and I said I'd better write something. But, I said, mine is dull compared to theirs.

Anne: [*Laughter*] Oh, I don't think so.

Bill: Oh, I don't know.

Anne: See now, what does this say. "To University of Alaska"?

Bill: Well, see my grandfather was up there. He went up during the gold rush. [*Tape cuts out briefly*] I copied the University of Alaska.

Anne: Oh. Burbank — no, Fairbanks.

Bill: Fairbanks.

Anne: Oh yeah.

Bill: Heck, I was up there one time. I should have taken a looksee.

Anne: Yes. You'd probably gotten wine and dined. [*Laughter*]

Bill: [*Laughter*] I don't think so. He was a great character, that grandfather of mine.

[00:59:24]

Anne: Sounded like it, from this oral history. So, you're trying to find a section in here about what Natomas was going to look like, that your dad —

Bill: I think it's on page 10. [*Reading from Elmer Christophel's personal history*] "The final chapter in this long narration and stirring tale is about to begin. The visionary sight of my father is now quite evident with signs of progress and development all around us." You got that?

Anne: Yup. [*Reading from Elmer Christophel's personal history*] "Eight-lane freeway. Interstate 5 to Sacramento is an actuality. Its completion stresses the growing importance of the Metro Airport. Inevitable all our plans and dreams will be fulfilled."

Bill: [*Tape cuts out briefly*] Look at that house up there. He just thought that was — he planned that all. It's the architect — Cato? It's right next to the Reclamation District office —

Anne: So, C-A-T-O?

Bill: I think it is K-A-T-O.

Anne: Oh. That used to be the Christophel homestead.

Bill: Uh-huh.

Anne: Not the homestead.

Bill: No —

Anne: It was the house that he had built.

Bill: Yes, he built that. [*Reading from Elmer Christophel's personal history*] "I have passed my 73rd birthday, yet each day presents a glorious outlook and challenge to the future. I visualize the rapid expansion of Sacramento northward. I foresee Vista View Apartments and condominiums all over the once little River View Orchard. It has been a long way, but a lifetime adventure and a very exciting and happy one." I used to tell my mom, she'd come out and I'd take her around and show her this stuff, and I'd say, "Dad knew all about it. He had it all figured out." [*Laughter*]

Anne: Yes. [*Laughter*] That is so good.

Bill: Yep.

Anne: So, let me help you. We'll just do it together. That will be so good. You know, I can — we can —

[*Tape ends abruptly — end of interview.*]